

Today, U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05) delivered the following speech on the House floor:

Mister Speaker, Americans have a penchant for believing that more is always better.

That unfettered and unabridged access will solve problems.

H.R. 2578, the Conservation and Economic Growth Act, purports to create jobs by violating or eliminating over 35 laws that currently govern our land, air, water, and importantly, our nation's borders.

The idea follows that in giving the Department of Homeland Security free reign to traverse the roughshod lands around our borders, we'll be safer.

But, the Department of Homeland Security didn't ask for this access, nor do they believe it's warranted.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano told a Senate subcommittee in March that unrestricted authority over public lands was unnecessary for the Border Patrol to do its job and was "bad policy."

And, we're not just talking the lands on the collar of America's borders.

No, this bill would disrupt your vacation in Cape Hatteras by lifting necessary current restrictions regarding the use of off-road vehicles.

The bill would allow corporations to dip right into Alaska's Tongass National Forest, allowing for trees that started growing before the Revolutionary War to be felled.

And, if someone decided that development of surveillance equipment in a national park was a good idea — say on Chief Mountain in Glacier National Park — it could be installed without any public comment or even internal review process.

This last point was made by two farmers and ranchers from the Mexico and Canadian borders, with more than a century of land-use between the two.

These folks who work the land, who have toiled to create and produce what the land will provide to them and their families for years, those who know it best – oppose this bill.

“In Arizona,” the gentlemen write “we are concerned that poorly designed roads and fences will damage ongoing range land restoration work.

Private landowners have spent thousands of dollars and manpower hours restoring these lands to their original state, which could all be compromised by these bills.”

Another veteran publically denounced the bill in an op-ed, stating “As a veteran, a patriot of this nation and a Californian, I can't stand by while these lands are threatened.

I'm proud to have worn this country's uniform and I want to continue serving.

That's why I've chosen to follow in the path of the great Teddy Roosevelt – a man who was both a soldier and a conservationist – and stand up for our public lands.”

That's right.

A veteran, a rancher, a farmer, the Secretary of Homeland Security, are NOT extolling the virtues of a true wild, wild west.

The stewards of the land know that in order for crops to flourish;

In order to protect the Sweet Grass Hills, in Montana, a sacred location for many tribal ceremonies – and a vital source of water for surrounding communities that it is protected from mining and most motorized travel;

In order to preserve the incredible natural beauty and uniqueness that makes this land great;

We must protect it.

Over 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt addressed a crowd in Kansas, a state that knows its lands.

"I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land," he said, "but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us..."

"Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war –

There is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.

I fear we miss the mark on today's legislation, and I urge my colleagues to join me in my opposition.

Thank you.

###

